

White Supremacy Culture Patterns

In Organizations

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About



This is a non-exhaustive list of common patterns of **white supremacy culture** in **organizations**. These patterns can be damaging because they may be ever-present, unconscious, and difficult to name, yet deeply embedded in the cultural norms that shape how we work, relate, and make decisions.

We offer this framework as an invitation to explore these patterns with **curiosity** and **self compassion**.



White Supremacy Culture Patterns

Patriarchy



Misogynoir



Labor
Extraction



Cis Hetero
Centering



Individualism



Constant
Crisis



Scarcity
Mindset



The Expert



Bigger is
Better



Power
Hoarding



Intellectual
Elitism



Binary
Thinking



Ancestral
Erasure



Objectivity



Perfectionism



Ableism



External >
Internal



Clout
Activism



Transactional >
Relational



Fear of Conflict



Martyrdom



Defensiveness



Right to Comfort



Shaming &
Disposability



Power Over Culture

Patriarchy



Misogynoir



Labor Extraction



The Expert



Cis Hetero Centering



Power Hoarding



Intellectual Elitism



Ableism



Ancestral Erasure



🔍 The Symptoms

These patterns reinforce control, hierarchy, and gatekeeping—often in nuanced ways. Even in values-aligned or mission-driven spaces, dominance can hide beneath well-meaning leadership, careful language, or systems built on “efficiency.”

- Work plans, timelines, communications, and culture reflect **dominant, white, Western, or Eurocentric norms**, excluding disabled, neurodivergent, and ancestral ways of being.
- **Power is protected** via gatekeeping, politeness, perfection, or eggshell walking, alongside a lack of transparency and accountability.
- **Decision-making** is centralized, informal, or not fully transparent. Decisions are communicated, not co-created
- **“Expertise”** is narrowly defined, privileging credentials over lived, cultural, or community-rooted knowledge.
- **Black women, trans folks, and folks with multiple oppressed identities** must “prove” themselves. They may often be interrupted, overruled, controlled, or heavily scrutinized.
- **Sharing vulnerability or uncertainty** is deemed “unprofessional”.
- **Care work, emotional labor, and relationship tending** is primarily held by women & femmes of color, queer & trans folks, and/or invisibilized.
- Leaders are invested in being **competent or right**—at the expense of learning, collaboration, or relational repair.
- **Critique is personalized** and received with defensiveness or dismissal.
- Ancestral, spiritual, or intuitive forms of wisdom are **“extra”—rather than integral** ways of knowing and leading.



The Medicine

Disrupting dominance doesn’t mean eliminating leadership, clarity, or decisiveness—it means shifting how power is held, shared, and understood. It invites a move from control to co-creation, from hierarchy to interdependence.

- **Make power visible.** Map who holds formal & informal decision-making authority, and who is most impacted by decisions. Invite input early and often.
- **Redistribute voice.** Who speaks first, most, or with assumed authority? Amplify under-heard voices (e.g. shared facilitation, stack systems, written check ins, etc.)
- **Center care.** Honor emotional labor, relational tending, and cultural bridging as leadership values transparently reflected in values and expectations.
- **Encourage leaders to model learning** in public, own mistakes, and seek feedback. Cultivate the conditions for collective wisdom to be heard and emerge.
- **Build shared practice around harm and repair.** Naming harm without shame. Creating shared responsibility for tending to impact and rebuilding trust.
- **Make space for complexity.** Commit to practice being in right relationship vs being right. Uplift patience, curiosity, and willingness to be in the mess together.
- **Expand what counts as knowledge.** Create intentional space to honor lived experience, embodied wisdom, ancestral and cultural practices.
- **Honor paced, nonlinear, and intuitive ways of knowing and integrating.** Include practices like storytelling, check-ins, silence, and ritual into meetings—not as add-ons, but as essential ways to reconnect with meaning and purpose.
- **Resource accessibility.** Design spaces, timelines, and communications that center neurodivergence, disability, and cultural difference—not as accommodations, but as practices of collective care and belonging.

Grind Culture

External >
Internal



Bigger is
Better



Perfectionism



Transactional >
Relational



Scarcity
Mindset



Labor
Extraction



Martyrdom



🔍 The Symptoms

These patterns emphasize outcomes over relationships, urgency over reflection, and quantity over care. They often emerge as internalized pressure to produce, prove, and perform—especially in nonprofit, academic, and activist spaces where people are navigating deep systemic pressures and external demands.

- **Burnout** is normalized, even valorized. Taking time off is discouraged or guilt-inducing.
- Success is measured in **numbers, speed, and visible output**—not depth of impact, relationship, or sustainability.
- **Overwork is praised**, and those who set boundaries may be seen as less committed.
- **Emotional and relational labor** (especially from BIPOC, queer, and femme staff) goes unacknowledged or uncompensated.
- Leaders operate from a place of **urgency, making reactive decisions** that leave others out of the loop.
- Time for process, pause, and feedback is consistently **deprioritized**.
- Healing, reflection, and rest are framed as **privileges or luxuries, not necessities**.
- Internal team care is seen as **separate from or less important** than “impact.”
- **Growth is equated with expansion**—more money, more staff, more programs—even when capacity is strained.
- **Scarcity narratives** (“We don’t have time/funding/staff”) limit imagination and creativity.



The Medicine

Shifting a culture of production means asking not just **what** we are doing, but **how** and **why**. It’s about slowing down to cultivate work that is grounded, spacious, and rooted in care—for ourselves, each other, and our communities.

- **Name the dynamic.** Make it a practice to notice and name it. Pause. Who and how does this approach support and/or harm? How can we invite spaciousness / creativity?
- **Define success holistically.** Co-create values-aligned measures of success that include relationships, sustainability, healing, process, and meaning-making—not just output.
- **Set realistic work plans.** Build in spacious timelines, rest periods, and buffers—not as a reward, but as a baseline.
- **Celebrate process.** Normalize moments to name effort, learning, collaboration, and care—not just deliverables or outcomes.
- **Practice relational accountability.** Integrate regular check-ins that focus not just on tasks, but on how people are feeling, connecting, and resourcing (self & others).
- **Honor different paces & capacities.** Especially across neurodivergence, disability, and trauma history. Ask: What would more spaciousness look like here?
- **Resist the myth of “not enough.”** Name scarcity mindset when it arises. Invite conversations about abundance, collective resourcefulness, and setting boundaries with funders, stakeholders, and/or other pressures.
- **Decenter martyrdom.** Notice the narrative: “If I don’t do it, it won’t happen.” Practice asking for support, delegating, or saying no. Support each other in doing the same.
- **Prioritize sustainability.** Regularly ask: What would make this work more sustainable? For me, for us, for future generations?

Avoidance Culture

Fear of Conflict



Objectivity



Perfectionism



Defensiveness



Right to Comfort



Shaming & Disposability



🔍 The Symptoms

These patterns prioritize emotional comfort—especially for those with more positional power—over collective accountability. Conflict, feedback, and emotional expression may be treated as threats to stability and productivity. As a result, naming harm, surfacing tension, or expressing impact may be silenced, pathologized, or punished.

- People are **hesitant to share hard truths or name harm** due to fear of backlash, punishment, or being cast out.
- **Feedback is avoided** or delivered in indirect, overly cautious, or triangulated ways.
- **Critique is seen as betrayal** rather than care or investment.
- Those who challenge dominant norms are labeled “**difficult**,” “**aggressive**,” or “**too sensitive**.”
- **Emotional expression** is dismissed as unprofessional or irrational—especially from Black, brown, femme, or disabled people.
- **Conflict is rushed toward solution & resolution**—without honoring what needs to be felt, named, grieved, or processed.
- Mistakes are equated with moral failure; **shame** is used to police behavior.
- People who raise concerns are **scapegoated, isolated, or quietly pushed out**.
- **High turnover & broken relationships** are normalized without reflection or tending.
- There is no process for collecting & integrating 360° feedback, exit interviews, or reflections from anyone who might be deemed as **disgruntled or difficult**.



The Medicine

Healing invites us to slow down, welcome discomfort as a teacher, and practice staying with each other through conflict, rupture, and relational tending. This doesn't mean avoiding boundaries or truths—it means centering courage, care, and clarity.

- **Normalize conflict** as a natural and necessary part of collective growth—not something to fear or avoid.
- **Slow down reactive loops.** Invite pauses when tensions arise. Make space for reflection, body awareness, and multiple perspectives.
- **Build collective agreements / touchstones & accountability practices** for giving and receiving feedback, addressing tensions, and tending to conflict and harm—before it happens.
- **Approach defensiveness with curiosity.** Ask: What's being protected here? What feels vulnerable? What story am I telling myself?
- **Define the nuance between boundaries & canceling.** Who's being left out, written off, or silenced? How can we center relationship and transformation?
- **Make space for feeling grief, anger, fear & joy.** Uplift expression as a leadership strength and a pathway to honor humanity and cultivate belonging.
- **Model transparency and tending.** Leaders set the tone by acknowledging mistakes, sharing their learning, and staying in relationship when things get hard.
- **Resource your team with ongoing learning & support.** Conflict literacy, facilitation skills, and somatic awareness are not innate—they can be learned and practiced, together.

Compartment Culture



The Symptoms

These patterns create a fractured culture that values separation over wholeness, intellect over embodiment, and appearance over depth. They erode relational trust, emotional presence, and collective intuition—especially in high-stakes or high-pressure environments.

- Success is defined by **polished performance, ideas, charisma, or external validation**—and may mask shallow or extractive practices underneath.
- Staff **may not feel safe** being themselves. Individuals learn to compartmentalize, hiding cultural, spiritual, neurodivergent, or emotional parts of themselves.
- **Relationships are instrumentalized.** People feel valued only for what they can produce, offer, or represent—not for who they are in their fullness.
- Team **cohesion is surface-level.** There's a sense of **doing** together vs **being** together.
- **Difficult decisions are rushed.** When pressure arises, teams default to **binary** choices (“yes or no,” “with us or against us”) instead of pausing to consider layered possibilities.
- **Nuance is framed as weakness or indecision.** People who take time to reflect, ask questions, or express uncertainty are seen as unclear or uncommitted.
- **Harm is intellectualized,** debated, or removed from emotional impact.
- **Decisions prioritize optics.** External validation drives choices more than internal coherence or values alignment.
- People feel **disconnected from each other, their purpose, values, and/or the impact of their work.** Driving timelines and deliverables leaves little space to reflect on what matters, who is affected, and how the work is done.



The Medicine

Healing fragmentation asks us to return to our wholeness—individually and collectively. It may look like choosing curiosity over certainty, allowing messiness instead of performance, or valuing relationship over optics. These shifts aren't checklists—they're ongoing practices that take time, intention, and support.

- **Invite process alongside outcomes;** prioritize depth, relationship, and alignment—not just deliverables.
- **Name and soften binary edges.** When “either/or” choices show up, pause. Ask: what nuance is being lost? Whose perspective might offer a “both/and”?
- **Center relationship.** Build team rhythms that allow for emotional check-ins, connection, and relational tending—not just logistics or planning.
- **Practice integrated reflection.** Regularly pause to ask: Are we aligned beneath the surface? What tensions or contradictions are we holding? What's not being said?
- **Honor multiple truths.** Lean into responses like: “I don't know,” “Let's sit with this,” or “This feels complex. Let's unpack some of the layers.”
- **Affirm multiple kinds of intelligence.** Honor the mix of cultural, ancestral, somatic, emotional, and intuitive knowing as vital to collective work and decision-making.
- **Uplift humility.** Model imperfection, iteration & revision, and mutual learning, including (and especially) in high-pressure and/or public moments,
- **Support collective spaciousness.** Create timelines that allow for digestion, feedback, and evolution—especially in moments of tension or uncertainty.

Chaos Culture



The Symptoms

Chaos culture often emerges in spaces and organizations that address real, daily harms. Even when rooted in care, a constant state of urgency can become normalized—sidelining rest, reflection, and inner work. These patterns are often justified in the name of the work, yet they **replicate the very systems we're trying to dismantle**. They disconnect us from our bodies, silence reflection, and burn out our people—especially folks whose labor and energy are already hyper-extracted.

- **Crisis & chaos are constant**; everything feels urgent and all-consuming.
- Leaders **valorize being overwhelmed or constantly busy**, rather than resourced and grounded.
- Everything is **constantly shifting or unclear**, including values and purpose; goals are disconnected from capacity.
- Inner work, conflict tending, and healing are **dismissed as personal, optional, and/or not the “real work”**.
- **Burnout** is common and a badge of honor, especially for those most impacted by injustice.
- **Time (working hours) is the ultimate measure of commitment**; speed is rewarded over alignment.
- **Scarcity** is constantly used to justify under-resourcing, disorganization, or harm. Budgeting prioritizes programs (output) over people.
- **People with disabilities, health challenges, and/or trauma** are deeply impacted (or harmed) by disorganized, rushed, or inflexible systems.
- Long-term planning and sustainability are constantly cast aside in favor of **short-term, reactive decisions**.



The Medicine

Disrupting chaos culture doesn't mean ignoring the urgency of injustice—it means **refusing to replicate the extractive dynamics of supremacy** in our movements and creating conditions where we can move with strategy, clarity, and care—not just survival.

- **Reclaim pace as political**. Build rhythms that sustain people and deepen connection, not just chase outcomes.
- **Model resourced, rested leadership**—not martyrdom. When leaders take time to replenish, it signals to the team that **care is culture**—not just individual responsibility.
- **Name urgency when it's present**. Pause to ask: Is this truly urgent, or are we replicating urgency culture? What's the cost of rushing?
- **Align commitments with capacity**. Engage in reflections about what can be held well—not just what can be done.
- **Practice flexible, anti Capitalist pacing and workflows**. Build in time for buffers, backups, reflection, and integration. Center accessibility, especially for chronically ill, disabled, neurodivergent, and/or frontline staff.
- **Resource healing & trauma responsiveness** as part of collective culture. Acknowledge that unaddressed trauma fuels crisis responses; **healing is movement work**. Invest in personal, collective, and organizational healing.
- **Honor grief, uncertainty & slowness** as necessary elements of justice work.
- **Center collaboration & planning** in non-crisis moments to strengthen collective resilience before rupture and harm happen.
- **Reframe slowing down as strategic**. Depth, clarity, and sustainability are what support collective power building.